

II. SPEECH

AS DELIVERED

Excellences, ladies and gentlemen,

- First, I should like to thank you for the invitation to address this year's Arctic Futures Symposium. I would also like to thank the organising committee for its hard work to ensure that the Symposium takes place annually in Brussels. Much appreciated.
- There is no doubt that we are facing **complex local and geopolitical dynamics** after the unprovoked and unjustified Russian war of aggression launched in 2022. This has had effects across the board and certainly in the Arctic context. But other factors also have considerable impacts on developments across the Arctic regions.
- The Arctic regions are likely to undergo **major transformations**. The EU will need to continue its engagement and, where required, further enhance its Arctic capacities.
- Major transformations across the Arctic regions are playing out **already and will continue over the next decades**. They will apply to the environment, the economies, the social fabric, legal structures and other fields. In the next decades, demographical shifts with population increases in some areas, while other areas may become depopulated. Arctic shipping, Arctic mining, Arctic

tourism and Arctic agriculture may become major sectors. This will have transformative effects for local inhabitants, local authorities and major repercussions on broader geopolitical dynamics.

- The **Arctic States will continue to carry the primary responsibility** for most developments on their territory -- eg in licensing and permitting procedures, infrastructure, etc -- but it is also clear that a number of challenges will go beyond national borders. With regard to such cross-border issues, regional and multilateral cooperation will remain essential. **The EU is an important partner in this context.**
- **Climate change:** We know the facts and have been reminded of them again just ahead of COP29 in Azerbaijan. Arctic temperatures are rising 3-4 times faster than in other parts of the globe, pointing increases of +9c to +12c degrees over the coming decades.
- The increase causes ice on land and at sea to melt and permafrost on land and under the sea-bed to thaw. This threatens the livelihood of local inhabitants incl. indigenous peoples and will transform the physical landscapes. Wild fires occur more frequently and cover larger areas. Local authorities, businesses and the Arctic States are struggling to get to grips with the ecological, economic and the social effects..
- **Resources:** At the same time, there is great interest in Arctic resources which are judged to become more accessible as climate change progresses. The resources of main interest are fish, gas, oil, coal and critical raw materials as well as Northern locations for installation of wind farms, data centers, radars, cables and similar equipment. Together with the growing interest in Arctic sea-lanes, it is

clear that external parties are gearing up to engage more comprehensively in some parts of the Arctic.

- **Security:** Tensions, which affect the Arctic, are primarily linked to global posturing.

During recent years, Russia has reinforced its military assets across its Arctic regions and Russian military exercises have become much more prevalent than they were two decades ago. Russia and China have held joint Arctic exercises.

New security challenges spreading: hybrid threats and cyber-attacks are already causing problems and require stronger defensive systems. The recent cable incidents in the Baltic point to the difficulties that we will face.

- Still, despite the changed circumstances following Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the **EU continues to believe that a safe, stable, sustainable, peaceful and prosperous Arctic** is important not just for the Arctic itself, but also for the European Union and the world.
- It is important to openly address the new Arctic dynamics among local inhabitants, local and regional authorities as well as among Arctic States and non-Arctic parties taking a strong interest in Arctic matters. None of us can ignore the **local and global importance of the coming transformations across the Arctic regions.**
- The EU is strengthening the network of security and defense dialogues. Norway, Iceland and Canada are essential partners. Just like any other Arctic State, the new US administration will need to address these issues constructively, in cooperation with key partners.

- In my view, these areas are particularly well-suited for civilian transatlantic cooperation now: sea-bed mapping, earth observation, wild fires and impacts from the thaw of permafrost.
- When it comes to dual-use assets, we need to be much more vigilant. Fishing vessels and cargo carrying vessels that conduct disruptive operations must be tackled with firmness.
- Where we can contribute to face these challenges in a robust, sustainable and inclusive way, the EU will work with like-minded States, partners, local authorities, representatives of indigenous peoples, NGOs, business representatives, researchers, think tanks and conference organisers.
- Let me stress again that the **EU is an active player in the Arctic; as a strategic Arctic actor, the EU will work in support of our Member States and in collaboration with our partners.**
- I wish all participants at this year's Arctic Futures Symposium a fruitful conference with a focus on Arctic matters, even if the broader picture is quite complex at present.
- Thank you for your attention.